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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005999

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA SATTERFIELD, NEA/IPA, NEA/RA LAWSON, OES/PCI
FOR PAYNE

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TAGS: PREL SENV KWBG IS JO MEPN

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN-ISRAELI WATER FRUSTRATIONS

Classified By: CDA DAVID HALE for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Jordanian Water Minister El-Naser expressed his disappointment over the past few months' behavior of his Israeli counterparts from the Joint Technical Water Committee. Pointing the finger at Israel for dragging its feet on Jordanian technical requests and charging them with obstructing water projects that Amman wants to initiate, El-Naser expressed frustration with what he characterized as an increasingly nettlesome relationship. Already exercised over apparent Israeli (and Palestinian) disinterest in the World Bank's draft Terms of Reference for the feasibility study on the Red Sea-Dead Sea Conveyance project (septel), El-Naser complained of getting the run-around from the Israeli MFA, Water Commissioner, and Ministry of Infrastructure on routine bilateral water issues. We urged El-Naser to continue to address Jordan's water concerns directly with his Israeli partners and maintain the lines of communication, noting that the JWC mechanism has generally worked well for the past nine years. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) During a September 15 meeting with visiting NEA Senior Science Advisor Dr. Charles Lawson and NEA Regional Environment Officer Paul Malik, Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation Dr. Hazem El-Naser vented about his increasing frustration with the members of the Israeli Joint Technical Water Committee (JWC) with whom he and his senior ministry colleagues routinely meet to coordinate water cooperation. El-Naser claimed that the usually constructive meetings had devolved into fora that were not yielding positive results. In fact, he charged the Israeli counterparts with obstructing work on Jordanian water priorities and with sowing an atmosphere of mistrust. We have had "problems with the Israelis during the past six months," he told us.

¶13. (C) Both El-Naser and the Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority, Zafer Alem, while conceding that "personal relations are very good" between them and their Israeli interlocutors, cited several examples of flagging Israeli cooperation. Complaints of Israeli disagreements over the Wihdeh Dam water allocation protocol have not stopped Amman from proceeding with the project, but remain an unresolved irritant. El-Naser repeatedly has raised with the Israelis their dumping of untreated effluent into the Jordan River, requesting them to build a wastewater treatment plant--to no avail. Finally, although the 25 MCM (million cubic meter) water concession that Israel provides Jordan annually during the summer to fulfill a commitment in the 1994 peace treaty ultimately was delivered, El-Naser registered his concern that this year's negotiations presage Israeli balking.

¶14. (C) Jordan's desire to capture winter floodwaters on the Jordan River by diverting them to the Karameh Dam has also met with Israeli opposition. When El-Naser offered to divert further upstream at a greater cost to Jordan, the Israelis continued to deny approval. COMMENT: At least partly, we understand, Israeli concern stems from Jordan's interest in tapping into the Jordan River in a location where the West Bank is on the other side of the river. In the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, all water projects mentioned were located north of the point where the Green Line intersects the Jordan River, specifically to avoid complications arising from dealing with West Bank areas. END COMMENT

¶15. (C) Another project that is threatened by the apparent lack of bilateral cooperation is the development of 50 MCM of additional water resources for Jordan. Although brackish water sources have been identified on both sides, Israel allegedly will not divulge detailed information on the sources and quality of the water it would provide, making Jordan fearful it is highly saline and contaminated with sewage. Moreover, El-Naser claims that Israel's contribution of limited brackish sources will not produce the stipulated 50 MCM of potable water, yet the Israelis have threatened to cut off the 25 MCM summer concession as soon as any amount of new water is produced for Jordan.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: This was the most agitated we have seen El-Naser over the Israeli-Jordanian water relationship. Historically, it has been a successful model of cooperation, with the notable exception in 1999, when tensions temporarily flared over delivery of Israeli water to Jordan but were

defused with the help of U.S. intervention. We believe that the current negative state of play on the RDC feasibility study is coloring El-Naser's view of his bilateral relationship with Israel. "We are suspicious of their (Israeli) intentions" regarding the RDC, said El-Naser. Lawson encouraged the Jordanians to persevere in resolving technical water issues through the JWC. On the margins of another meeting in Jordan on September 16, Israeli MFA Multilateral Peace Process Director Yaakov Keidar expressed surprise at the Jordanian characterization of the recent JWC deliberations and countered by telling us that the Israeli government had approved the Jordan River diversion and other projects and the Jordanian delegation had returned the signed protocol within the last few days.

HALE